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ABSTRACT

Recent studies have shown that school self-esteem is one of the greatest contributors to overall self-esteem among adolescents in grades 7-12. Research suggests that middle schools play a significant role in the development and socialization of early adolescents. The first purpose of this study was to examine the relations between school self-esteem, intrinsic valuing of education, and students' academic achievement as measured by GPA. During adolescence, parents, teachers, and peers are widely recognized as the primary groups that impact these school-related values and behaviors. Adolescents often internalize the values that are communicated both directly and indirectly by significant others. However, few studies have explored the relations between these contextual influences and students' values related to education. A second aim of this study was to investigate the relationships between values communicated by parents, teachers, and peers and students' own intrinsic value of education. Results of this study indicate that intrinsic value of education mediates the relationship between parental expectations, teacher respect, peer academic support and school self-esteem for middle school students. Further, the internalization of these values directly influences a student's overall feelings of worth in regards to school. (Contains 11 references.) (JDM)

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Values as a Mediator of Contextual Sources of School Self-Esteem

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Values as a Mediator of Contextual Sources of School Self-Esteem

Recent studies have shown that school self-esteem is one of the greatest contributors to overall self-esteem among adolescents in grades seven thru twelve (DuBois, Felner, Brand, Phillips, & Lease, 1996). Research suggests that middle schools play a significant role in the development and socialization of early adolescents (Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan, 1996). Therefore, it seems important to understand what comprises the school self-esteem of adolescents. In recent years, researchers have suggested that self-esteem is based not only on one's perceived competence in a domain (self-concept), but also on the values or standards used to evaluate self-descriptions (DuBois et al., 1996). Thus, a student might be average in math, but meeting his/her own standards, he/she has high math self-esteem. Conversely, a student with low math self-esteem may get "A's" yet not feel he/she is living up to his/her expectations. Thus, this suggests that students who have poor performance but see little value in education should suffer less declines in their school self-esteem as compared to students with poor performance who highly value education. Therefore, the first purpose of this study is to examine the relations between school self-esteem, intrinsic valuing of education, and students' academic achievement as measured by GPA.

During adolescence, parents, teachers, and peers are widely recognized as the primary groups that impact these school-related values and behaviors (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1991; Murdock, Anderman & Hodge, in press; Ryan & Stiller, 1991; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornsbusch, & Darling, 1992; Wentzel, 1998). Adolescents often internalize the values that are communicated both directly and indirectly by significant others (Ryan & Stiller, 1991). However, few studies have explored the relations between these

contextual influences and student's values related to education. It was hypothesized that the values of others indirectly affect school self-esteem through their relationship to students' own values. Thus, a second aim of this study was to investigate the relationships between values communicated by parents, teachers, and peers ands students' own intrinsic value of education.

Method

Participants

The sample for this study included approximately 549 7th and 8th grade students from a public semi-urban middle school in a midwestern city (278 females and 271 males). Students voluntarily participated in data collection as part of a larger study of the school's contextual environment during the Spring of 1999.

Measures

Demographic Data. District data files were used to obtain information regarding students' grades. Grades represent the average GPA of students' first-semester performance across five major subject areas: math, reading, English, social studies, and science.

Peer Academic Support. Peer academic support was measured by 11 items that assessed both affective and behavioral academic support (Murdock 1994; 1999) Reliability was adequate for this measure (α = .76).

Parental Academic Support. Modified versions of the parental encouragement subscale developed by Steinberg (1992) was utilized to measure parental academic support. The parental encouragement subscale consists of 7 items in which students

report on the degree to which their parents convey the need to do well in school, explicitly and implicitly (α = .81).

Teacher Respect. The 7 items on this scale developed by the third author were designed to examine student perceptions of teachers' level of regard or concern for them in the academic setting. This scale has been used with middle-school populations and has demonstrated adequate reliability (α = .81)

Intrinsic Value of Education. Intrinsic value of education was measured using a 5 item scale developed by Pintrich & De Groot (1990) as part of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ). The scale has demonstrated adequate reliability evidence with this age group (α = .75).

School Self-Esteem. The Self-Esteem Questionnaire (SEQ; DuBois et al., 1996) was used to assess the self-esteem of adolescents. The SEQ consists of 42 items and yields scores for self-evaluations relating to five different domains (peer relations [8 items], school [8 items], family [8 items], physical appearance [4 items] and sports/athletics [6 items]), as well as global self-esteem (8 items). For the present study, scores for only the school subscale will be utilized (α = .80).

Results

Moderately positive correlations between all variables were found. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between teacher respect, parental expectations, peer academic support and intrinsic value of education. The three variables were enter concurrently. Overall, the 3 predictors accounted for 28.8% of the variance in intrinsic value of education. Parental expectations (β = .115; $p < .01$), teacher

respect (ß = .359; p < .001), and peer academic support (ß = .235; p < .001) were all significant predictors of intrinsic value of education respectively.

Further analysis investigated whether the relationships between GPA, intrinsic value of education and school self-esteem. Both variables were entered concurrently into the regression along with the interaction of GPA and intrinsic value of education. The three variables explained 22.3% of the variance in school self-esteem. GPA (ß = .388; p < .001) and intrinsic value of education (ß = .193; p < .01) were both unique predictors of school self-esteem however, the interaction term was not significant.

On the basis of these analyses, both hypothesis were supported. Parental expectations, teacher respect, and peer academic support significantly influenced students' intrinsic value of education. Results also demonstrated support for mediation of the relationship between these three variables and school self-esteem by intrinsic value of education. In addition, GPA significantly contributed to the explanation of school self-esteem.

Discussion

Results of the present study indicate that intrinsic value of education mediates the relationship between parental expectations, teacher respect, peer academic support and school self-esteem for middle school students. The findings of this investigation suggest that these three external sources clearly impact the value that student's place on educational endeavors. Further, the internalization of these values directly influence a student's overall feelings of worth in regards to school. Educational settings may benefit from further investigation of the effect of values on school-related behaviors (e.g. GPA and academic effort) and self beliefs (e.g. self-concept and self-esteem).

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